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Understanding the Jihadi Salafi threat in Jordan in 2011-2017

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ABSTRACT

The number of Jordanian foreign fighters that joined extremist groups in Syria and Iraq since 2011 has drawn attention to the Jihadi Salafi scene in Jordan. This article examines the profiles of 780 Jihadi Salafis who were prosecuted in 2011–2017 on terrorism-related charges by the State Security Court in Jordan. The study attributes the rise of Jihadi Salafism in Jordan to socio-economic relative deprivation. The dissatisfaction of the employed and/or educated with their status explains relative deprivation, which is also an urban central phenomenon in Jordan. However, relative deprivation does not turn into radicalization unless experienced within a closely knit social network. The article concludes that Jihadi Salafism is a middle-class urban and central phenomenon in Jordan, which is likely to continue due to unaddressed frustrations, unmet identity needs, and the social network of radicals.

Introduction

Interest in Jihadi Salafism in Jordan grew from the mid-1990s when fellowship of this ideology expanded, but only became noticeable through a series of violent attacks in the mid-2000s. Although only 16 attacks were launched in Jordan between 1994 and 2018, Gråtrud finds that an alarming 82 similar attacks were foiled by Jordanian authorities in the same period, which shows the grave danger extremism presents for Jordan's security and stability.¹

Recently, the ideology and its adherents attracted more attention due to the flow of Jordanian foreign fighters to Syria, when the conflict began there in 2012 and Iraq in 2014 and 2015 following Daesh's establishment of its Islamic State. Jordanian foreign fighters are not a new phenomenon, as Jordanians had fought earlier among the *mujāhidīn* in Afghanistan, and later alongside al-Qaeda in Iraq in the early 2000s. The rise of violent extremism in the region, however, intensified scrutiny of Jihadi Salafism and its threat in Jordan.

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¹Henrik Gråtrud, 'Urban Terrorism in the Arab World: Introducing a Dataset of Jihadist Attack Plots in Jordan', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2021), 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2021.1957674> (accessed 25 February 2022).

There are no accurate numbers of Jordanian foreign fighters. In 2015, the number of foreign fighters was estimated at 2000.² A report, published in 2017, estimated the number of Jordanians joining Daesh at 3000.³ This puts Jordan as the second-biggest sender of foreign fighters among Arab countries, only preceded by Saudi Arabia with 3244 fighters, and followed by Tunisia with 2926 fighters.⁴ These numbers have raised concern about Jordan being a breeding ground for radicalization in the region, particularly since many extremist leaders are Jordanian.

Interestingly, there are hardly any academic studies examining the phenomenon of Jordanian foreign fighters who joined Daesh. Perhaps, Abu Rumman and Shteivi's book *Sociology of Extremism and Terrorism in Jordan: An Empirical and Analytical Study* is the only major work that addresses this issue.⁵ The book uses a sociological approach to study the determinants of joining Jihadi Salafism, relying mainly on presenting case studies of convicted terrorists. However, the book does not promote any specific theories related to the determinants of extremism in Jordan.

This article attempts to examine the profiles of Jihadi Salafis in Jordan after 2010. We utilize, for this purpose, a sample of 780 Jihadi Salafis who joined the fight in Syria or Iraq or were prosecuted at Jordan's National Security Court for terrorism-related charges in the period 2011–2017. We refer to Jihadi Salafism as the underpinning belief system of Muslim, ideologically driven individuals who joined the fight in Syria and Iraq, or who encouraged it, facilitated it, or attempted to join extremist groups. Jihadi Salafism is one branch of Salafism that generally consider all Arab regimes as apostates, and advocates for violence as a tool of political and social change.

We focus on the link between relative deprivation and radicalization. Relative deprivation involves the perception that oneself or one's group does not receive the same valued resources, goals, ways, or standards of living that others possess, and to which one feels rightfully entitled.⁶ We argue that relative deprivation, experienced as dissatisfaction with employment or education and socio-economic status leads to radicalization when a closely knit social network of ideologically motivated individuals brings these relatively deprived individuals together.

Our data is based upon that presented in Abu Rumman and Shteivi's aforementioned study.⁷ We review their data for accuracy and correct several discrepancies found in the original dataset. Our descriptive study focuses on identifying radical profiles, that is, whether radicals are poor, unemployed, educated, from urban or rural areas and so forth, aiming to find common themes among these profiles.

This article contributes to the relevant literature in two ways; firstly, to our knowledge, no study has so far analysed the profiles of Jordanian Jihadi Salafis who joined extremist groups in Syria and Iraq in the post Arab Spring era. Our novel (and broad) dataset provides a good opportunity for adding informative insights to the academic analysis of

²Counter Extremism Project, 'Jordan: Extremism and Counter-Extremism', Counter Extremism Project, <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/jordan> (accessed 15 March 2021).

³Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees* (The Soufan Center and The Global Strategy Network, October 2017).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Mohammad Abu Rumman and Musa Shteivi, *Sociology of Extremism and Terrorism in Jordan: An Empirical and Analytical Study* (Amman: Centre for Strategic Studies, 2018).

⁶Séamus A. Power, 'The Deprivation-Protest Paradox: How the Perception of Unfair Economic Inequality Leads to Civic Unrest.' *Current Anthropology* 59, no. 6 (2018), 765–89.

⁷Abu Rumman and Shteivi, *Sociology of Extremism*.

radicalization in Arab countries and can even feed into policy research to contain the phenomenon. Second, and most importantly, we fill a significant gap in literature on radicalism and terrorism in Jordan, as there are hardly any academic articles linking relative deprivation to Jihadi Salafism in Jordan. Gråtrud states that most studies tackling radicalism and terrorism in the Jordanian context are reports or policy briefs focusing mainly on general drivers of radicalization.⁸ Literature on terrorist profiles in Jordan are generally scarce, and even more so any related to relative deprivation as a possible motive for radicalism.⁹ Thus, our study provides novel and timely analysis of a phenomenon hardly studied before in academic literature.

The next section presents theories on the link between relative deprivation and radicalization. We then introduce the reader to Jihadi Salafi stages of developments in Jordan. After detailing the methodology, the article presents the quantitative findings, and then discusses them.

Theoretical background

A considerable body of theoretical and empirical literature addresses the relationship between relative deprivation and violent, collective action, even among people who are not personally deprived but act on behalf of the group.¹⁰ Relative deprivation is the perceived discrepancy between the aspirations of individual youth and the challenges opposing their aspirations, which pushes youth towards different worldviews and roles that may help them achieve their aspirations whether related to identity, financial or social needs.¹¹ Gurr argues that individuals can be subjectively deprived irrespective of whether basic needs are met, and vice versa, abject poverty does not necessarily bring about relative deprivation among the poor.¹²

Relative deprivation operates through three processes: first, individuals make cognitive comparisons. Second, they regard themselves or their in-groups as disadvantaged. Third, they experience angry resentment.¹³ Such resentment facilitates their gratification towards radical groups or engaging in violent acts.¹⁴

Interestingly, although Smith et al. show that empirical studies examining the effect of relative deprivation on a multitude of different social and psychological outcomes, commonly yield weak and inconsistent results,¹⁵ the authors state that relative deprivation 'continues to be usefully employed throughout the social sciences'.¹⁶ Moreover, the

⁸Henrik Gråtrud, 'When Insularity Becomes a Problem: The Literature on Jihadism in Jordan', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2020), 9, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1723282> (accessed 27 January 2022).

⁹Ibid, 10.

¹⁰Heather J. Smith, Thomas F. Pettigrew, Gina M. Pippin, and Silvana Bialosiewicz, 'Relative Deprivation: A Theoretical and Meta-Analytic Review: A Theoretical and Meta-Analytic Review', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16 (3) (2012): 203–32; Eran Zaidise, Daphna Canetti-Nisim, and Ami Pedahzur, 'Politics of God or Politics of Man? The Role of Religion and Deprivation in Predicting Support for Political Violence in Israel', *Political Studies* 55, no. 3 (2007): 499–521.

¹¹Iain Walker and Thomas F. Pettigrew, 'Relative Deprivation Theory: An Overview and Conceptual Critique', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 23, no. 4 (2011): 301–310; and Walter G. Runciman, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice: A Study of Attitudes to Social Inequality in Twentieth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

¹²Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971).

¹³Heather J. Smith, 'Relative Deprivation: A Theoretical and Meta-Analytic Critique', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16, no. 3 (2012), 203–232.

¹⁴Alex I. Macdougall et al., 'Different Strokes for Different Folks: The Role of Psychological Needs and Other Risk Factors in Early Radicalisation', *International Journal of Development Science* 12, no. 1–2 (2018), 37–50.

¹⁵Smith et. al.: 203.

¹⁶Ibid: 221.

author concludes, 'Measured properly, [Relative Deprivation] is a significant predictor of a wide range of important outcome variables spanning collective action, individual deviance, and physical and mental health'.¹⁷ This assertion resonates with growing empirical evidence on the relationship between relative deprivation and radicalization.¹⁸

Carvalho examines relative deprivation in the Islamic world at large, which underwent 'a growth reversal that raised aspirations for upward mobility and subsequently left aspirations unfulfilled among the educated middle class'. The lower-middle class, the author argues, has been particularly hard hit by growing inequality and pauperization, leading to a broad Islamic revival.¹⁹ Research into eight Arab countries argues that relative deprivation has a strong association with radicalization since unemployment among the educated intensifies support for violent extremism.²⁰ Freer argues that relative deprivation is still relevant even in wealthy rentier Arab states.²¹

Focusing mainly on Muslim individuals, a considerable body of empirical literature shows that those enrolled in higher education and high earners are more likely to support and sympathize with violent protest and acts of terrorism.²² Gambetta and Hertog extensively use relative deprivation theory to explain why highly educated individual, especially those with an engineering degree, are three to four times more frequent among violent Islamists worldwide than other degree holders.²³

Relative deprivation is prevalent in the case of Jordan. In their discussion of political, economic and social frustrations, most studies on radicalization in Jordan refer to a perceived discrepancy between aspirations and realities.²⁴ Youth in four different governorates have referred to nepotism and corruption that limits their access to employment. They connect this to self-esteem, humiliation in their immediate social circles and lack of trust in the state.²⁵

Similarly, residents in radicalization hotbeds in Jordan point to lack of basic infrastructure and services that the government should provide. They compare this to the heavy-handed approach of the state to security issues in the area, which signals that the state is

¹⁷Ibid: 221.

¹⁸Jonas R. Kunst and Milan Obaidi, 'Understanding Violent Extremism in the 21st Century: The (Re)Emerging Role of Relative Deprivation', *Current Opinion in Psychology* 35 (2020): 55–59; and Kees van den Bos, 'Unfairness and Radicalisation', *Annual Review of Psychology* 71, no. 1 (2020): 563–88.

¹⁹Jean-Paul Carvalho, *A Theory of the Islamic Revival* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2009).

²⁰Kartika Bhatia and Hafez Ghanem, 'How Do Education and Unemployment Affect Support for Violent Extremism? Evidence from Eight Arab Countries', Brookings Global Economy & Development Working Paper 102 (March 2017), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/global_20170322_violent-extremism.pdf (accessed 20 February 2022)

²¹Courtney Freer, 'State Religious Authorities in Rentier Economies and the Management of Independent Islamism', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 47, no. 1 (2020): 42–61.

²²Kamaldeep Bhui, Nasir Warfa, and Edgar Jones, 'Is Violent Radicalisation Associated with Poverty, Migration, Poor Self-Reported Health and Common Mental Disorders?', *PLoS One* 9, no. 3 (2014): e90718; Simon Ozer, Milan Obaidi, and Stefan Pfattheicher, 'Group Membership and Radicalisation: A Cross-National Investigation of Collective Self-Esteem Underlying Extremism', *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 23, no. 8 (2020): 1230–48; Alan B. Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

²³Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad: The Curious Connection between Violent Extremism and Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

²⁴Sean Yom and Katrina Sammour, 'Counterterrorism and Youth Radicalisation in Jordan: Social and Political Dimensions', CTC Sentinel 10, no. 4 (2017), Counterterrorism and Youth Radicalization in Jordan: Social and Political Dimensions—Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (usma.edu); Neven Bondokji, Kim Wilkinson, and Leen Aghabi, *Trapped Between Destructive Choices: Radicalization Drives Affecting Youth in Jordan* (Amman: WANA Institute, 2016).

²⁵Bondokji, Wilkinson, and Aghabi, *Trapped Between Destructive Choices*, 20.

present only when it wants to discipline people.²⁶ When they compare their conditions to those in Amman, the capital, residents in other governorates feel deprived and underserved by their government.

Although earlier research in Jordan points to financial incentives or lack of education as key factors for going to Afghanistan in the 1990s,²⁷ more recent evidence points to the middle-class and mixed educational backgrounds of radicals.²⁸ It is hard to ascertain the conclusive role of relative deprivation in radicalization, because studies usually offer unsubstantiated generalizations on profiles of Jordanian radicals. One article notes:

‘the majority of Jordanians who are radicalising and joining violent extremist groups are male, young (between 14 and 35), come from a low socioeconomic status, have few or no job opportunities, come from urban areas, feel excluded from society, are not well educated about Islam or in general, and are dissatisfied with the government. Being married does not seem to have a large influence on likelihood to radicalise’.²⁹

But it is unclear how the author reaches this conclusion, given that the article is based on six expert interviews only.³⁰ Similarly, a commonly cited—although unpublished—survey with 840 residents in Irbid, Zarqa and Tafleeh in 2017, concludes that those who uphold radical views are middle class, university-educated people who live in rural areas. However, the methodology and questions for this survey do not stand up to scrutiny, and organizers of the poll were advised against publishing it.

Two reports in 2015³¹ and 2018 establish the direct link between contextual frustrations, psychological needs and radicalization. The latter report is based on interviews with three returnees and their relatives and friends. It argues that contextual factors frustrated the returnees, including the influence of peers at work or friends that helped them take the decision to go to Syria. Ideology played a role for two of them, but it was the victimization of Syrian women and children that pushed the third to go to Syria. Again, the report shows that contextual frustrations are an important first step towards radicalization.

The perceived discrepancy is not limited to socio-economic factors but also extends to political grievances. Hegghammer argues for the primacy of political factors over socio-economic frustrations,³² which goes against Atran’s argument that socio-economic grievances are the main drivers of radicalization.³³ Jordanian youth are affected by regional political drivers of radicalization, but local political disappointments contribute to frustrations. These include repression and lack of freedom of expression, according to one poll on radicalization drivers.³⁴ In addition, the weak Jordanian national identity, widespread

²⁶Neven Bondokji and Barik Mhadeen, *White Paper: Towards More Effective Human Security Approaches in the Context of the Emerging Threat of Violent Radicalization in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia* (Amman: WANA Institute, 2019), 10.

²⁷International Crisis Group, *Jordan’s 9/11: Dealing with Jihadi Islamism*, International Crisis Group (November 2005): 4.

²⁸Abu Rumman and Shteivi, *Sociology of Extremism*; Mercy Corps, *From Jordan to Jihad: The Lure of Syria’s Violent Extremist Groups*, 2015, 3–4.

²⁹Anna Fraher Klingensmith, ‘The Role of Local Communities in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) in Jordan,’ *Independent Study Project Collection* 3153 (2019), 19–20.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Mercy Corps, *Jordan to Jihad*.

³²Thomas Hegghammer, ‘Terrorist Recruitment and Radicalisation in Saudi Arabia,’ *Middle East Policy Winter* 13, no. 4 (2006): 39–60.

³³Scott Atran, ‘The Devoted Actor: Unconditional Commitment and Intractable Conflict across Cultures,’ *Current Anthropology* 57, no. S13 (2016): S192–S203.

³⁴Alaa’ al-Rawashdeh, ‘Ideological Extremism from the Perspective of Jordanian Youth (in Arabic),’ *Arab Journal for Security Studies and Training* 31 (2015).

corruption, meddling with national institutions, and the intervention of security forces all contribute to the radicalization of Jordanians.³⁵ 'Young Jordanians are susceptible to radicalisation not just because Islamist radicalism seems so strong, but because the political alternative—everyday life as a Jordanian citizen—is so weak.'³⁶ Jordanians cannot take pride in their Jordanian identity.³⁷

Identity needs explain the search for adventure, attempts to enhance one's self-esteem socio-economically or religiously, search for belonging, and identification with a victimized group and then defending it. Identity needs also take shape as a resistance identity against hegemony or perceived illegitimate inter-group relations.³⁸ However, studies that examine identity needs in Jordan are based on interviews with experts, and not with radicals themselves. Therefore, generalizations abound. Speckhard goes to the extent of claiming that sexual child abuse and mental illness explain the phenomenon in Jordan with no direct evidence and based on interviews mostly with non-experts on the subject.³⁹

Crucially, identity needs are activated through peer influence, the salience of which is confirmed by Atran's study of Daesh members,⁴⁰ and Hegghammer's examination of Saudis who went to Afghanistan.⁴¹ The role of peers is well examined in the sociological approach of Abu Rumman, who has established the formidable social network of Jihadi Salafis in Jordan. In *I am Salafi*, he discusses identity transformations among Salafis of all types. The quest for identity was facilitated through networks of peers in which Salafis are indoctrinated and experience identity transformation. The networks commonly evolved in specific neighbourhoods.⁴² Similarly, in another book, Abu Rumman and Shteiwi present 10 case studies that highlight how a network of Jihadi Salafis took shape in families, peers of former Muslim Brethern, smugglers or neighbours.⁴³

In summary, socio-economic and political relative deprivation increase one's awareness of unmet identity needs. Once in a group of like-minded peers, these identity needs get activated. Then 'small groups of action-oriented' individuals take form.⁴⁴ This article attempts to understand the role of relative deprivation in the rise of radicalization in Jordan.

³⁵Yom and Sammour, 'Youth Radicalization in Jordan', 28.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Julian Richards, *Extremism, Radicalization and Security: An Identity Theory Approach* (Buckingham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

³⁹Anne Speckhard, *The Jihad in Jordan: Drivers of Radicalization into Violent Extremism in Jordan*, ICSVE Research Reports (25 March 2017).

⁴⁰Atran, 'ISIS is a Revolution'; and Associated Press, 'Expert: Friends Recruit Most Islamic State Fighters', *Associated Press*, 25 November 2015.

⁴¹Hegghammer, 'Terrorist Recruitment', 39–60.

⁴²Mohammad Abu Rumman, *I am Salafi: A Study of the Actual and Imagined Identities of Salafis* (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2014), 202–212.

⁴³Abu Rumman and Shtewi, *Sociology of Extremism*, 111–190.

⁴⁴Scott Atran and Richard Davis, 'Executive Summary', in *Theoretical Frames on Pathways to Violent Radicalization*, (Washington D.C.: ARTIS, 2009), 5–12.

Jihadi Salafism in Jordan

Salafism started as a reformist Sunni movement seeking to purify Islam from deviant practices and political submission to colonial powers.⁴⁵ Others analyse Salafism as a protest movement against changes that historically impacted the practices and theological underpinnings of Islam.⁴⁶

Jihadi Salafism is one branch among four categories of Salafism.⁴⁷ The first branch is Academic Salafism (*as-salafiyya al-'imiyya*), which is largely proselytizing and shuns political activism. The second type of Salafism is *aj-Jāmiyya*, after Muhammad bin Aman al-Jami, which is politically conservative and advocates for obedience to the ruler, hence they resist political opposition. The third is *Hirāki* Salafism, a term that refers to a movement. This branch of Salafism believes in political reform and advocates for political opposition through peaceful means.

The fourth category, Jihadi Salafism, is a radical ideology that advocates for violence to impose social and political change. Its main ideologue, the Jordanian al-Maqdisi, clarifies that it combines calls for Islamic monotheism and violence to achieve unity and fight 'tyrannical' leaders.⁴⁸ The evolution of the ideological underpinnings of Jihadi Salafism has turned it into the most violent branch of Salafism, and all Islamic political groups. al-Qaeda and Daesh embrace this ideology, the latter being more extreme.⁴⁹

In Jordan, Jihadi Salafism existed before the 1990s and was influenced by the rise of Takfiri groups in Egypt and Salafism in Gulf countries. But it has been growing in Jordan since the mid-1990s, and six factors have shaped its growth there.

First, in the 1980s, Jordanians were influenced by Salafi scholars and the Jordanian Abdulla Azzam, bin Laden's mentor, and both fought the Soviets in Afghanistan. Jordan was happy to see its Islamists join the fight in Afghanistan.⁵⁰ But later these Jordanian *Mujāhidīn* returned.⁵¹ Jihadi Salafism took a violent form with the Pledge of Allegiance (*Bay'at al-Imām*) case in 1995,⁵² which marked the operational and ideological launch of Jihadi Salafism in Jordan. This was a secret cell that operated in 1992–1999 and plotted attacks. At that time, the Jihadi Salafi movement took form in prison, with key names like al-Maqdisi, who became a key global ideologue for Jihadi Salafism, and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi who later established al-Qaeda in Iraq.⁵³

⁴⁵Joad Wagemakers, *Salafism* (Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Religion, 2016); Kirk H. Sowell, *Jordanian Salafism and the Jihad in Syria* (Washington D.C: Hudson Institute, 2015), 3.

⁴⁶Sowell, *Jordanian Salafism*, 3–4.

⁴⁷For a brief review, see Abu Rumman, *I am a Salafi*, 41–54.

⁴⁸Al-Maqdisi, dialogue on 'The Forum for Monotheism and Jihad', Alsunna Website, <http://www.alsunnah.info/r=i-j37307wg> (accessed 19 March 2021).

⁴⁹On the disagreements between al-Qaeda and Daesh, see Sowell, *Jordanian Salafism*.

⁵⁰International Crisis Group, *Jordan's 9/11*, 4.

⁵¹Stenmann and Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 195.

⁵²MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis No. 239, Yael Yeshoshua, 'Dispute in Islamist Circles over the Legitimacy of Attacking Muslims, Shi'ites, and Non-combatant Non-Muslims in Jihad Operations in Iraq: Al-Maqdisi vs. His Disciple Al-Zarqawi', MEMRI, 11 September 2005, [Dispute in Islamist Circles over the Legitimacy of Attacking Muslims, Shi'ites, and Non-combatant Non-Muslims in Jihad Operations in Iraq: Al-Maqdisi vs. His Disciple Al-Zarqawi](#) | MEMRI (accessed 5 April 2021).

⁵³For a brief account on Zarqawi, see Juan José Escobar Stenmann, 'Islamic Activism in Jordan', *Athena Intelligence Journal* 3, no. 3 (2008), 16–18. For a detailed account, see Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, *The 'Islamic Solution'*, 344–350.

Second, King Abdulla pardoned prisoners including Jihadi Salafis in 1999. Upon release, al-Zarqawi departed to Afghanistan and later went to Iraq, where he established the *at-Tawhīd wal Jihād* group in 2003 and then joined al-Qaeda in 2004, thus, turning into a hero for Jihadi Salafis. Hundreds of Jordanians joined the fight in Iraq upon the 2003 US invasion.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, different groups were formed in Jordan. In 2005, al-Zarqawi orchestrated the Amman bombings, killing 60 people.⁵⁵ The different cells and operations in this second stage indicated the spread and strength of Jihadi Salafis in Jordan.

Third, fractions among Jihadi Salafis over doctrinal issues attracted more members. These issues go back to the mid-1990s,⁵⁶ but intensified when al-Zarqawi and al-Maqdisi disagreed publicly on doctrinal matters, including attacking civilians in Iraq. The disagreements between the two camps escalated in 2009⁵⁷ and became accentuated by the schism between Daesh, on one side, and al-Nusra Front and al-Qaeda, on the other.⁵⁸ Newcomers to Jihadi Salafism in Jordan between 2006 and 2010 attempted to reconcile disagreements while rejecting violence in Jordan to no avail.⁵⁹

Fourth, the wave of protests in the region after 2010 gave Jihadi Salafis the opportunity to proclaim their presence on the Jordanian political scene.⁶⁰ They organized protests calling for the release of approximately 300 Jihadi Salafi prisoners and stated their political choice for God's sovereignty.⁶¹ However, a confrontation in April 2011 with security forces in Zarqa marks a turning point. More than 200 people were arrested and prosecuted in State Security Court,⁶² Jihadi Salafi protests came to an end, the public became weary of Jihadi Salafis after they appeared with swords and knives in protests,⁶³ and the state succeeded in pushing Jihadi Salafis out of the public space. The public's weariness of Jihadi Salafis became even more pronounced after the immolation of Jordanian Muaz al-Kassasbeh by Daesh in 2015.⁶⁴

Fifth, Jihadi Salafis, particularly those imprisoned and released after the Zarqa events, went to Syria in 2012 onward. They became the nucleus of a group that more Jordanians joined later. Most joined al-Nusra Front and Daesh. Nesser and Gråtrud argue that all Jihadist activity in Jordan relates to transnational links and drivers.⁶⁵ Although an exaggerated claim, several regional factors attracted Jordanians. Extremist groups, for example, offered a dream of a dignified ruling system. Daesh played on these identity needs by establishing a Caliphate, tackling the growing Sunni concern about the Sunni power

⁵⁴Stemmann, 'Islamic Activism in Jordan', 16.

⁵⁵'Jordan Remembers Victims of 2005 Hotel Bombings', *The Jordan Times*, 8 November 2014.

⁵⁶For a detailed discussion, see Eli Alsech, 'The Doctrinal Crisis within the Salafi-Jihadi Ranks and the Emergence of Neo-Takfirism', *Islamic Law and Society* 21, no. 4 (2014), 419–452.

⁵⁷Alsech, 'The Doctrinal Crisis', 435.

⁵⁸For a discussion on post 2010 disagreements, see Sowell, *Jordanian Salafism*.

⁵⁹Abu Rumman and Abu Hanieh, *The 'Islamic Solution'*, 444–447.

⁶⁰Sowell, *Jordanian Salafism*, 2.

⁶¹Dale Gavlak, 'Jordan Protests: Rise of the Salafist Jihadist movement', *BBC*, 22 April 2011, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-13163870> (accessed 13 March 2020).

⁶²Mohammed al-Nijar, 'A Jordanian Confrontation with Jihadi Salafism', *al-Jazeera*, 17 April 2011, <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/reportsandinterviews/2011/4/17/%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A9-%D8%A3%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D9%87%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%A9> (accessed 13 March 2020).

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Abby Ohlheiser and William Booth, 'Islamic State Video Claims to Show Burning Death of Jordanian Pilot', *The Washington Post*, 3 February 2015, Islamic State video claims to show burning death of Jordanian pilot—The Washington Post (accessed 13 March 2020).

⁶⁵Petter Nesser and Henrik Gråtrud, 'When Conflicts Do Not Overspill: The Case of Jordan', *Perspectives on Politics* (2019): 1–15.

vacuum in the region. Likewise, the failure of non-violent protests in Libya and Syria convinced some that violence is more rewarding than political activism. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict and Israel's continuous violations of international law act as a constant reminder of Arab weaknesses. The US invasion of Iraq has also accentuated a sense of Arab victimization. Whether Jihadi Salafi or not, many Arab Muslims felt the injustice directed towards fellow Muslims. Joining a rising extremist group gave them a sense of purpose to correct these injustices.

Finally, a series of attacks took place in 2016 that raised concern about Jihadi Salafism and harnessed support for security forces for their crackdown on them. In March 2016, violent confrontations took place between a Jihadi Salafi cell and security forces in Irbid that left one security officer and several cell members killed.⁶⁶ In June 2016, a former Jihadi Salafi prisoner attacked an intelligence office at al-Baq'a camp and killed some officers.⁶⁷ In September, the leftist journalist Nahid Hattar was shot dead by another Jihadi Salafi for posting a caricature that was deemed to insult Islam.⁶⁸ In December 2016, Daesh members attacked a police station in Karak, taking refuge in its castle and kidnapping tourists as hostages.⁶⁹ Consequently, the state reinstated capital punishment. Those convicted in Irbid confrontations, the attacker in al-Baq'a, and the killer of Hattar were among those executed.

This account offers a necessary historical background to understanding the profiles of Jihadi Salafis and how relative deprivation contributes to their rise in Jordan. We define Jihadi Salafis in three categories. First, anyone who was killed in Syria or Iraq or elsewhere fighting alongside Daesh, al-Nusra, al-Qaeda or any similar groups. Second, anyone who has joined these groups, and is fighting with them, or joined them and returned to Jordan, even if s/he has renounced this ideology. Third, anyone who was sentenced by virtue of a categorical ruling by the State Security Court after cessation and appeal. This includes sentences on forming terrorist cells and groups, attempting to join and/or promoting these groups.

Methodology

Our analysis is based on a sample of 780 individuals, who fit the operational definition detailed above. The data was collected from three sources. First, the authors referred to records of the State Security Court, where these individuals were prosecuted. This is a military court, with one civilian judge. By Jordanian law, this is the court that rules on national security, treason, espionage and terrorism.⁷⁰ One of the authors submitted an

⁶⁶Jordan raid: Eight Killed in Irbid as Forces 'Foil IS Plot', *BBC*, 2 March 2016, Jordan raid: Eight killed in Irbid as forces 'foil IS plot'—BBC News (accessed 3 March 2020).

⁶⁷Jordan Officers Killed in Attack at Baqaa Camp Near Amman', *BBC*, 6 June 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36459495#:~:text=Five%20people%20have%20been%20killed,intelligence%20officers%2C%20the%20officials%20said> (accessed 3 March 2020).

⁶⁸Jordan Writer in Blasphemy Case Nahid Hattar Killed', *BBC*, 25 September 2016, Jordan writer in blasphemy case Nahid Hattar killed—BBC News (accessed 3 March 2020).

⁶⁹Rana Hussein, 'Security Forces Announce Elimination of Karak Terror Cell', *The Jordan Times*, 19 December 2016, Security forces announce elimination of Karak terror cell | Jordan Times (accessed 3 March 2020).

⁷⁰On criticism to the court, See Victoria Silva Sánchez, *Lights and Shadows of Jordan's Counterterrorism Strategy?* (Madrid: IEE, 2018), 12.

official request to access court records. The right to access of information is not protected in Jordan. Therefore, the court offered records in stages and in patches without agreeing to specific criteria. The authors had limited ability to negotiate this with the court.

Court records include details on names, age, gender, place of residence, and charges of those prosecuted at the court. Court files also include education and employment details. But these are incomplete or not detailed enough. For example, court files only state whether an individual is educated or illiterate, without detailing the level of education or field of study. Likewise, the files usually record whether an individual was employed or unemployed at time of arrest, without including data on sector of employment or profession.

Second, social media proved crucial to collect more details about persecuted Jihadi Salafis through their networks. We reviewed available information on the persecuted, and contacted friends and peers to complete data gaps in court records about education, employment, social status, etc. In the process, a snowball technique became possible. We identified dozens of friends and relatives of the research subjects, who were previously persecuted or were persecuted at the time, and others who were then fighting in Syria. This supplemented the data set obtained from the Court and increased the total number of research subjects.

Finally, the authors organized nine interviews with four lawyers who defended suspects in these cases on their personal initiatives and were willing to speak to us. The interviews sought to verify and check the data gathered from the families and social media accounts on education and employment variables. The interviews were carried out between May and October 2017 (Table 1). We do not refer to these interviews in the article, since the interviews served only to verify variables.

Although the sample size is large enough for quantitative analysis, our data pool is limited by our sources and the time frame. A wider analysis of Jihadi Salafis in Jordan will require a longer timeframe to account for different generations across the six factors discussed above. Also, court records are not conclusive tools. Not all Jihadi Salafis have court cases against them. The analysis here is indicative and inconclusive.

In addition, our sample includes four women. Authors' observations and discussions in local communities for other publications include references to women Jihadi Salafis who are active in advocating for Daesh, or who have attempted joining it. However, documentation of these cases remains limited.

Table 1. Lawyers interviewed for data collection.

Lawyer	Date	Location
Mousa Al-Abdallat	3 May 2017	Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, Amman
	10 May 2017	
	12 May 2017	
	25 May 2017	
Taher Nassar	2 July 2017	Lawyer's office in Zarqa
	7 July 2017	Lawyer's office in Zarqa
	25 July 2017	Lawyer's office in Amman
AbdulQader Al-Khatib	8 September 2017	Lawyer's office in Amman
Hikmat Al-Rawashdeh	October 21, 2017	Lawyer's office in Amman

Results

Affiliation and whereabouts

A total of 780 Jihadi Salafis are profiled in this research sample: of these, 242 (31%) were affiliated with Daesh; 206 (26.4%) with Takfiri groups; 159 (20.4%) with al-Nusra, and 26 (3.3%) with al-Qaeda (Figure 1).

Jordanian authorities arrested 254 (32.6%) of the total 780, 31 (4%) were killed in confrontations with Jordanian authorities, 190 (24%) were killed outside Jordan, mainly in Syria, while fighting with these groups and 46 (5.9%) were still fighting outside Jordan in 2017. Others in the sample are Jordanians, who engaged in violent acts, were members of Jihadi Salafist groups, or who attempted to join such a group.

Demographic and socio-economic characteristics

A youth phenomenon

Data on age is available for 735 out of the 780. Like elsewhere in the world, Jihadi Salafism is a youth phenomenon in Jordan. Youth are defined in the region as those between 15 and 29 years old⁷¹ 424 (57%) of Jihadi Salafists are young. This includes 52 (7%) between 13 and 19 years, 202 (27%) between 20 and 24 years, and 170 (23%) between 25 and 29 years. However, studies examining the Middle East commonly define youth as an age group that extends to 30 years or 35 years based on the underlying challenges of unemployment and lack of financial abilities, which postpone the transition to adulthood.

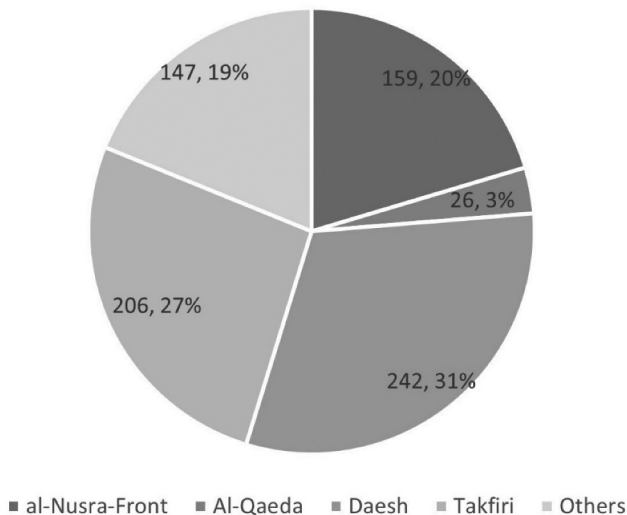


Figure 1. Jordanian Jihadi Salafis by Affiliation.

⁷¹UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2016: Youth and the Prospects for Human Development in a Changing Reality* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2016), 8.

'Waithood', to use Singerman's term, becomes the key marker of youth in the region, with the uncertainty that comes with it.⁷² Therefore, if we extend the parameters of defining youth to 35 years old, then the total of youth in our sample is 571 (77%) (Figure 2).

The contextual factors usually discussed in relation to radicalization apply to those up to 35 years old. Economic challenges like nepotism and corruption limit their opportunities and undermine their economic advancement. This and other social challenges lead to identity questions associated with low self-esteem, whereby individuals embark on a quest for a role in life. But one can also attribute the high percentage of youth to the 'social club' of Jihadi Salafis, to use Atran's phrase, who argues that extremists operate through networks of bonding and recruitment, which form in sports clubs, mosques or families.⁷³ In this kind of bonding, the common narrative and selective consciousness on grievances intensify.

Jordan has one of the youngest populations in the world, with 63% of its population under the age of 30.⁷⁴ Jordan is witnessing a 'youth bulge', as a large share of the population comprises children and young adults. Empirical evidence shows that countries with large youth bulges are generally more vulnerable to public violence and unrest.⁷⁵ Urdal states that 'after 11 September 2001, youth bulges have become a popular explanation for current political instability in the Arab world and for recruitment to international terrorist networks'.⁷⁶ Thus, we can argue that youth bulge might be one of the reasons leading Jihadi Salafi recruitment in Jordan.

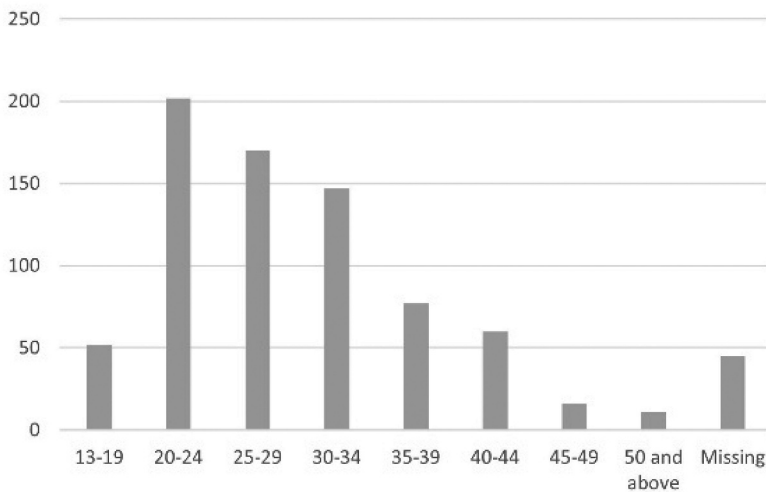


Figure 2. Jordanian Jihadi Salafis by age.

⁷²Diane Singerman, *The Economic Imperatives of Marriage: Emerging Practices and Identities among Youth in the Middle East* (Washington D.C.: Middle East Initiative Working Paper 6, Wolfensohn Center for Development at Brookings, 2007), 11.

⁷³Scott Atran, *Talking to the Enemy: Religion, Brotherhood, and the (Un)Making of Terrorists* (New York: Ecco Press, 2010).

⁷⁴UNICEF, 'Youth', <https://www.unicef.org/jordan/youth>

⁷⁵Jack A. Goldstone, 'Demography, Environment, and Security', in Paul F. Diehl and Nils Petter Gleditsch, *Environmental Conflict* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2001), 84–108.

⁷⁶Henrik Urdal, *The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950–2000* (Washington, DC., Social Development Papers, 2004).

Another factor clarified through age variables pertains to the minimal but critical percentage of older ideological hardliners, who embraced Jihadi Salafism for at least two decades. Of the 780 Jihadi Salafis, only 11 (1%) are 50 years or older and 16 (2%) are between 45 and 49 years. Some of these fought in Afghanistan in the 1980s and supported al-Qaeda in the 1990s. Their influence as parents and grandparents, or respected elderly in their local communities should not be underestimated. They keep the family networks cohesive and with clear leadership.

However, the status of these elderly shifted from celebrated *mujāhidīn* into unwelcome terrorists.⁷⁷ This has led to feelings of relative deprivation; they feel entitled for a celebrated high status, but they attain an unescapable stigma. The ensuing antagonism towards the state and the relative deprivation is transmitted to younger generations through unmet identity needs. The small number of older Jihadi Salafis also correlates with the findings of a considerable body of literature that shows that older Arabs have higher preference for religious freedom and democracy than younger Arabs.⁷⁸

A family phenomenon

Analysis of the social networks of the individuals and the generational linkages confirm earlier findings on this sample that Jihadi Salafism in Jordan has turned into a family phenomenon: a grandfather, a father, a radical spouse, and children who are all Jihadi Salafis.⁷⁹ The age range in the sample includes juveniles as young as 13 and the oldest at 59. The ideological influence often extends to cousins, in-laws or friends.

Some studies discuss the role of families in the radicalization of Europeans but given the different cultural and socio-economic conditions in Europe,⁸⁰ we find it unhelpful to extend this argument in an attempt to understand this role among Jordanians. More relevant is Hegghammer's work on Saudi radicals. Families encourage radicalization indirectly through the high status and respect an individual gets when he is a *mujahid* in Iraq. Hegghammer notes that the celebrations and congratulations families get when a son becomes a martyr, are indicative of the social respect they get.⁸¹ This was common in Jordan as well. Suffice it to note the celebratory funeral gathering al-Zarqawi received in Jordan upon his death in Iraq, despite planning the Amman bombings of 2005.

Families also directly encourage radicals. Hegghammer notes that Saudi fighters in Iraq often emulated a father or an uncle.⁸² Likewise, Saudi members of al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula were former fighters in Afghanistan, who were preceded by a brother or

⁷⁷International Crisis Group, *Jordan's 9/11*, 4.

⁷⁸Lars Berger, 'Shari'a, Islamism and Arab Support for Democracy', *Democratization* 26, no. 2 (2019): 309–326; Mazen Hassan, Elisabeth Kendall, and Stephen Whitefield, 'Between Scylla and Charybdis: Religion, the Military and Support for Democracy Among Egyptians, 2011–2014', *Democratization* 25, no. 2 (2018): 273–292.

⁷⁹Abu Rumman and Shtewi, *Sociology of Extremism*, 53–54.

⁸⁰Stefan Maltherer, 'Spaces, Ties, and Agency: The Formation of Radical Networks', *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12, no. 2 (2018): 32–43; Stefan Maltherer and Peter Waldmann, 'The Radical Milieu: Conceptualizing the Supportive Social Environment of Terrorist Groups', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 37, no. 12 (2014): 979–998.

⁸¹Thomas Hegghammer, 'Saudis in Iraq: Patterns of Radicalization and Recruitment', *Cultures & Conflicts*, English documents (June 2008), para. 29–33, <http://journals.openedition.org/conflicts/10042> (accessed 20 March 2022).

⁸²Ibid.

a friend. The ideological factors for the decision were enshrined within families.⁸³ In Jordan, a similar dynamic is at play as evident from kin relations among Jihadi Salafis.⁸⁴ Future research should question family profiles instead of individuals. Relative deprivation is experienced as a member of a group and is likely to get accentuated in families where a sense of victimization prevails.

When it comes to marriage, our data shows that 458 (66%) of the sample were married at the time of arrest or when they left Jordan to join the fight in Syria or Iraq, whereas 234 (34%) were single (Figure 3). Data on this variable is available for 692 of the 780 individuals examined here.

It is difficult to assess the impact of marriage. Studies that examine individual cases do not provide conclusive evidence. Marriage can increase feelings of relative deprivation due to financial and social pressures. Marriage is also likely to strengthen peer influence. Jihadi Salafis operate as a close network. They intermarry and strengthen their 'social club' that comes with shared grievances and self-proclaimed victimization.

Gender

Our sample includes four women (0.5%) who meet the operational definition of Jihadi Salafis for this article. All four are in the youth age category, and two were married at the time of arrest. Although a minority in the research sample, the crucial role of women in

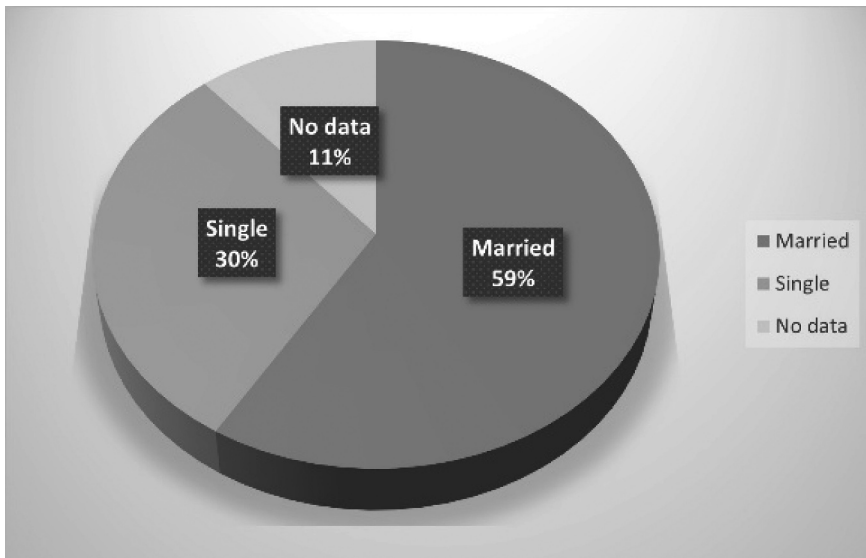


Figure 3. Marital Status of Jordanian Jihadi Salafis.

⁸³Thomas Hegghammer, 'Militant Islamism in Saudi Arabia: Patterns of Recruitment to "Al-Qaida on the Arabian Peninsula"', in Leila Bokhari et. al., *Paths to Global Jihad: Radicalization and Recruitment to Terror Networks*, Proceedings from a FFI Seminar (Oslo: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2006), 22–29, https://www.academia.edu/21757863/Paths_to_Global_Jihad_Radicalization_and_Recruitment_to_Terror_Networks (accessed 8 March 2022).

⁸⁴Abu Rumman and Shtewi, *Sociology of Extremism*, 111–190.

radical families deserves attention. Wives and mothers promote the ideology and sometimes actively encourage male members. One-third of Jordanian mothers in one sample have supported their son's decision to join extremist groups in Syria.⁸⁵ Two wives supported their husbands' decisions to join Daesh.⁸⁶ Several other examples of women's role in supporting Jihadi Salafism draw attention to family networks. According to Tobiassen, Jihadi Salafism in Jordan is sustained through intermarriages that 'strengthen the bonds between members as well as protecting the families from outside influences'.⁸⁷

The rise of women in Jihadi Salafi groups reflects ideological shifts that distinguish Daesh from al-Qaeda. Daesh incorporated an active role for women in operations, whereas al-Qaeda has limited them to supportive secondary roles. This has encouraged some women to join Daesh.⁸⁸ In 2015, the media reported on a Jordanian woman who attempted to join Daesh,⁸⁹ with reference to two others whose cases were never publicized.⁹⁰ Anecdotal evidence, particularly from impoverished Rusayfeh suggests that more young women joined Jihadi Salafis in Syria than documented.⁹¹

Women face the same contextual challenges of men. But their access to employment and educational opportunities is further hindered by poor public transportation that affects their safety. In marginalized areas like Rusayfeh, women's relative deprivation is significantly higher than that of men, considering how their conservative society further restricts their opportunities. According to a young woman from the city, 'those whose living conditions are unbearable, dying as a martyr with an extremist group is better than committing suicide'.⁹² Being a martyr or a fighter gives women a role and respectful status that they are otherwise deprived of in their daily lives.

Education

Data on educational achievement, which is available for 628 individuals, reveal two trends. The less educated make up to 476 (75.8%) of the sample. This includes those who completed school or parts of it. But the level of educational attainment is generally high in Jordan.⁹³ Therefore, it is intriguing that the uneducated make up this high percentage.

There are two explanations to this. First, the strictest among Jihadi Salafis consider the government educational curriculum to be un-Islamic and educate their children informally. This strengthens their social network and increases their alienation from society. Second, an earlier study on Jordanian Afghans argued that radical groups tend to recruit the less educated to indoctrinate them into violence.⁹⁴ While this might be true for some, the larger context points elsewhere. 'Lower education tends to promote terrorism in

⁸⁵Mercy Corps, *Jordan to Jihad*, 8.

⁸⁶Focus Group Discussion in Rusayfeh, 14 July 2016 with Neven Bondokji.

⁸⁷Benedicte Tobiassen, 'Married to Jihad: Investigating intra-jihadi dynamics through female members of the Jordanian Salafi Jihadi movement' (master's thesis, University of Oslo, 2019).

⁸⁸Mohammad Abu Rumman and Hassan Abu Hanieh, *Infatuated with Martyrdom: Female Jihadism from Al Qaeda to the Islamic State* (in Arabic) (Amman: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2017), 88–128.

⁸⁹'Reports on a Young Jordanian Women Joining Daesh (in Arabic)', *Al-Ghad Daily*, 4 November 2015.

⁹⁰'A Second Young Jordanian Women Attempted to Join Daesh (in Arabic)', *Sawt al-Balad*, 16 December 2015.

⁹¹Focus Group Discussion in Rusayfeh, 14 July 2016 with Neven Bondokji.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³OECD Development Centre, *Youth Well-being Policy Review of Jordan*. (Paris: OECD Youth Inclusion Project, 2018), 32.

⁹⁴International Crisis Group, *Jordan's 9/11*, 4.

a cluster of countries where socioeconomic, political and demographic conditions are unfavourable'.⁹⁵ This is particularly true in urban poor areas where the sense of frustration with available services increases.

The highest level of vocational secondary education, for example, is found among fairly poor urban youth, whereas the highest level of university education is found among well-off urban youth.⁹⁶ In one meeting, one youth angrily questioned why vocational education is promoted only in stigmatized poor urban areas. It is never promoted among the affluent residents of western Amman. Therefore, his peers and himself refuse to join a vocational school because of the stigma associated with vocational education.⁹⁷ In this context, government efforts to address socio-economic conditions fuel relative deprivation instead of containing it.

However, the research sample includes 227 (20.2%) individuals who completed a university degree. These include 115 (18.3%) who completed a bachelor's degree, 5 (0.8%) a Master's degree, and 7 (1.1%) a PhD (Figure 4). This is a sizable one-fifth of the sample.

Gaining a university degree in Jordan may well lead to unemployment, which was 18.5% in 2017 and 24.7% in 2020.⁹⁸ Yom and Sammour argue that:

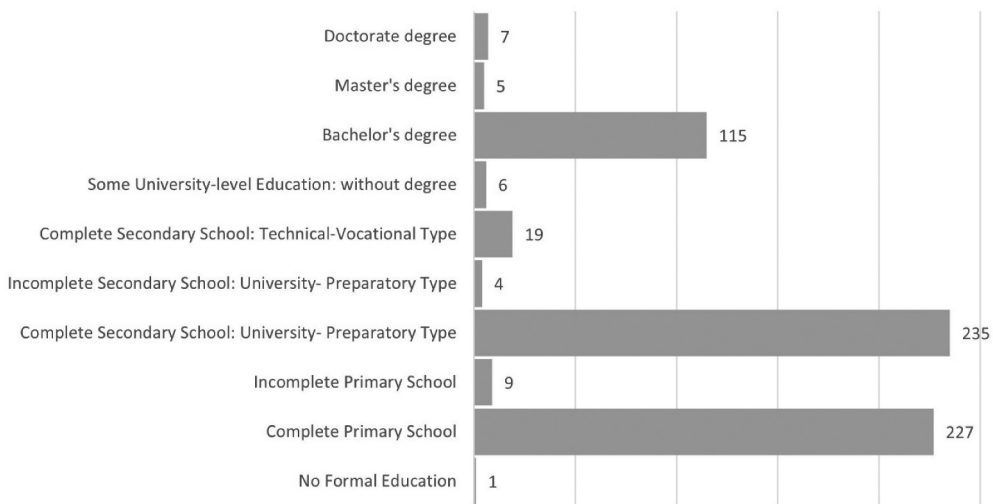


Figure 4. Jordanian Jihadi Salafis by education.

⁹⁵Sarah Brockhoff, Tim Krieger, and Daniel Meierriecks, 'Great Expectations and Hard Times: The (Nontrivial) Impact of Education on Domestic Terrorism', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59, no. 7 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002713520589> (accessed 16 February 2022)

⁹⁶OECD Development Centre, *Youth Well-being*, 33.

⁹⁷Qtd. in Bondokji and AlHaj, *A Read of Human and Population Security*, 16.

⁹⁸Unemployment Rate, Jordan Department of Statistics, Unemployment rate—Department of Statistics (dos.gov.jo) (accessed 17 March 2021).

'going to college penalizes Jordanians because it reduces their likelihood of finding work commensurate with their skill level. In this context, it is easy to grasp the deprivation felt by many youngsters, particularly those from middle-income families hit hard by rising prices and creeping poverty'.⁹⁹

This increases perceptions of relative deprivation among Jordanians with a university degree, thus facilitating their affiliation with radical groups similar to findings in eight other countries in the region.¹⁰⁰

Data on field of education were hard to obtain, but findings show an almost neat equality between those with Shari'a education (Islamic Studies and Jurisprudence) and engineering degrees. While one study argues that engineers gravitate towards radicalization,¹⁰¹ two factors explain the situation of Jordanian Shari'a graduates. First, entry requirements to study Shari'a are lenient. It is one of the few options left to those with low average results in national examinations. Students with weak analytical and critical thinking skills study Shari'a.¹⁰² Once enrolled, they interact with professors with divergent religious views. Students become confused and lost and are unable to weigh the difference between the religious views and jurisprudence rulings they get at college. They then graduate without a clear religious authority to guide them; thus, some gravitate towards Jihadi Salafis sheikhs.¹⁰³

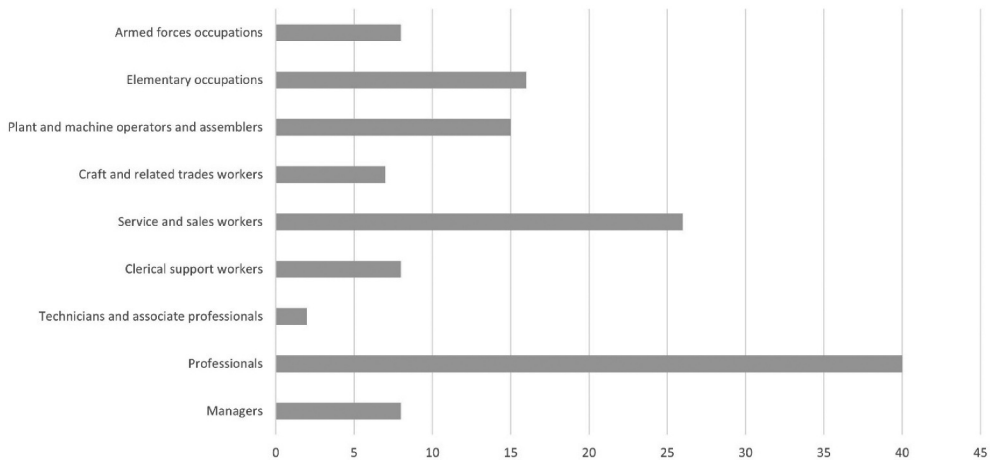


Figure 5. Jordanian Jihadi Salafis by employment.

⁹⁹Yom and Sammour, 'Youth Radicalisation in Jordan', 27.

¹⁰⁰Bhatia and Ghanem, 'How Do Education and Unemployment Affect Support for Violent Extremism?'

¹⁰¹Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, 'Why Are There So Many Engineers among Islamic Radicals?', *European Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 2 (2009): 201–30.

¹⁰²Nama' Al-Banna (Shari'a professor at UoJ), interview with Neven Bondokji, 22 February 2017.

¹⁰³Amer Al-Hafi (Professor of comparative religion at Al-Bait University), interview with Neven Bondokji, 24 January 2017.

Employment

The data reflects the employment status of individuals at the time of arrest, or when they left Jordan to join extremist groups. Employment data is available for 163 individuals in the sample, out of which 33 (20.2%) are unemployed. Although the unemployed make up around one-fifth of the sample, a closer look at the data clarifies that Jihadi Salafism is a middle-class phenomenon.

Using International Standard Classification of Occupations, almost 30% of those employed are professionals, including 14 schoolteachers, 13 mosque Imams, 3 medical doctors, 2 engineers and 2 university professors (Figure 5).¹⁰⁴ Service and sales workers are the second-largest group, comprising around one fifth of our sample of employed Jihadis. Almost all individuals in this group are either shopkeepers or salespersons. These might not have completed their education but were able to find jobs. Around 12% of those employed belong to elementary occupations, such as manufacturing and construction labourers. Another 12% are plant and machine operators, almost all of them are drivers.

There are no studies that examine why the percentage of schoolteachers and Imams is higher than other occupations among Jihadi Salafis in Jordan. But 'schoolteachers and Imams are the two most crushed groups of professionals'.¹⁰⁵ They are relatively highly educated with a university degree but are also among the least paid in Jordan. The schoolteachers' monthly salaries range between USD300-600, and that of Imams is around USD500. They improve their income by undertaking other jobs as taxi drivers, tutors, or selling beads and incense. Economic difficulties affect social status. 'Imams shy away from saying they are Imams. Socially, our job is looked down upon'.¹⁰⁶ The same applies to teachers whose status is plummeting. This leads to a process of questioning their life purpose, the value of their education and the quest for meeting their identity needs.

Political and security policies also intensify the sense of deprivation. Teachers lack professional representation. Jordan allowed a teachers' syndicate to form in 2011 but in 2019-2020 clashed with the union, disbanded it and arrested its leaders.¹⁰⁷ Thus, in terms of perceived relative deprivation, they are one group with high awareness of their unmet needs. Similarly, Imams face pressures from the public who expect them to provide religious rulings on financial, environmental and political matters, although Imams lack proper training on these issues. There is also pressure from security agencies to report suspected radicals. Third, the pressure from radical Imams who excommunicate teachers (*takfir*), creating a hostile environment for them. Therefore, the socio-economic and political environment they work in is a source of frustration.

This creates a cycle of relative deprivation and unmet identity needs that activate the search for better worldly opportunities or in the afterlife. 'When the reality becomes too difficult, those with religious inclinations will pursue heaven in the afterlife as the better option in what they believe is the best way, even if through violence'.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, schoolteachers' and Imams' search for improved status, religiously, is pursued through radicalization.

¹⁰⁴International Labour Office, *International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08): Structure, Group Definitions and Correspondence Tables*, (Switzerland: International Labour Office, 2012).

¹⁰⁵Mohamad Al-Majali (Shari'a professor at UoJ), interview with Neven Bondokji, 2 February 2017.

¹⁰⁶Anonymous Imam in Salt city, interview with Neven Bondokji, 10 April 2017.

¹⁰⁷Human Rights Watch, *Jordan's Teachers' Syndicate Closed; Leaders Arrested*, *Human Rights Watch* (30 July 2020), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/30/jordan-teachers-syndicate-closed-leaders-arrested> (accessed 1 June 2021).

¹⁰⁸Al-Banna, interview.

In addition to this, there is also a relative deprivation triangle that explains radicalization in Jordan. Its vertices are level of education, level of actual employment and income and (dis)satisfaction with one's reality. Discussing education in the Arab world, Bhatia and Ghanem note,

'from their perspective they [Arab youth] have fulfilled their part of the social contract. They have studied and passed exams, and their families have born the financial burden of their education. They feel frustrated because by failing to provide them with jobs that reflect their level of educational attainment [,] society is not respecting its part of the contract'.¹⁰⁹

While the quotation refers to society, it is the social contract between citizens and the state that is failing. Government officials blame poverty, social media and ideology to avoid responsibility. But governmental failure in employment-generating, educational system reform and political inclusion is creating the contextual frustrations that fuel radicalization.¹¹⁰

The educational system is the central vertex of this triangle. Like other countries in the region, education in Jordan leaves those educated with little knowledge or employable skills. They also acquire skills that are not required in the labour market. This misfit between type of education and market needs explains youth frustration with available opportunities.¹¹¹ In addition, the education system prepares youth for the public sector that is no longer capable of absorbing graduates. This can explain why our data on employment by sector, which is limited to 120 individuals only, shows that 78 (65%) worked in the private sector, and the rest in the public sector. Employees in the private sector are more likely to be underemployed in professions that do not match their skills.

Geographic distribution

Data on geographic area of residence is available for 762 individuals. The findings reveal a clustering of radicals in urban central areas of Jordan. Nevertheless, the southern and marginalized city of Ma'an remains prominent on the radical scene.

Numbers of Jihadi Salafis from each governate reveal that 318 (41.7%) are from Zarqa, a largely urban lower middle-class area in central Jordan. Zarqa is known as 'the capital of Jihadi Salafism in Jordan'. Dozens of its residents were killed in Afghanistan,¹¹² and both al-Maqdisi and al-Zarqawi hail from there.¹¹³ Zarqa has suffered from decades of marginalization, lack of recreational outlets, poor infra-structure and presence of Salafi groups.¹¹⁴

The second-largest clustering of radicals is in the northern city of Irbid with 132 (17.3%) individuals. Irbid and Zarqa are the second and third-largest cities, respectively, after the capital Amman. Map 1 shows that central governates like Balqa, Amman and Zarqa have become a hub of radicals. A total of 93 (12.2%) come from Balqa and 91 (11.9%) from

¹⁰⁹Bhatia and Ghanem, How Do Education and Unemployment Affect Support for Violent Extremism?, 10.

¹¹⁰Steven Heydemann, *Countering Violent Extremism as a Field of Practice*, Insights 1 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2014), <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Insights-Spring-2014.pdf> (accessed 15 January 2022).

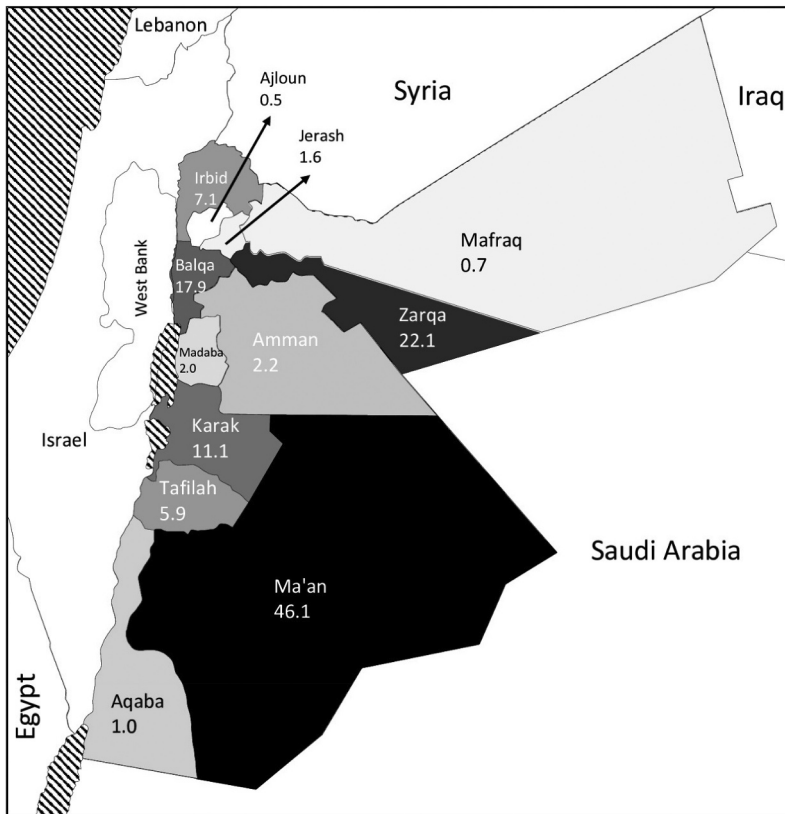
¹¹¹T. S. Rabie, *The Last Mile to Quality Service Delivery in Jordan*, Directions in Development (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2017), <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/26577/9781464810695.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y> (accessed 15 January 2022).

¹¹²Al-Hayat Inquiry: The City of Al-Zarqaa in Jordan—Breeding Ground of Jordan's Salafi Jihad Movement, *MEMRI*, 17 January 2005.

¹¹³Hazem Alameen, 'Zarqa Gave Birth to Al-Khalila and Al-Maqdisi, Where They Were Joined by Those Returning from Kuwait (in Arabic), *AlHayat Newspaper*, 15 December 2004.

¹¹⁴Madison Springfield Inc., *Drivers and Barriers Impacting Propensity Towards Violent Extremism. Zarqa: Target Location Analysis*. (Amman: USAID, November 2016).

Amman. When combined with Zarqa, all three governorates account for 502 (65.8%) of Jihadi Salafis (Table 2). Since loyalty to the state has been traditionally rural,¹¹⁵ a higher level of frustrated individuals in urban areas is understandable. Although citizens with equal rights, residents in central urban areas see the discrepancy in services and opportunities between them and others in western Amman, which is reachable within 45 minutes from both Balqa and Zarqa.



Map 1. Jordanian Jihadi Salafis per 100 K population by governorate (2017).

When examining the data based on the numbers of Jihadi Salafis compared to total population, results confirm the earlier status of Ma'an as a radicalization hotbed.¹¹⁶ There are 70 (46.1%) Jihadi Salafis in Ma'an for each 100 K of population. Ma'an is historically an unrest hotbed for clashes with the state, which has a heavy-handed approach towards Ma'an and is unable to control levels of marginalization therein.¹¹⁷ Therefore, Ma'an still tops the list.

¹¹⁵Myriam Ababsa, 'Citizenship and Urban Issues in Jordan', in Myriam Ababsa et Rami Daher, *Villes, pratiques urbaines et construction nationale en Jordanie* (Presses de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient, 2011), 45–46.

¹¹⁶ICT Situation Room, *The Rising Threat in Ma'an, Jordan* (Herzliya: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2014).

¹¹⁷Amjad Shamout, *Ma'an: An Open Crisis (In Arabic)* (Amman: Centre for Strategic Studies, 2013); International Crisis Group (ICG), *Red Alert in Jordan: Recurrent Unrest in Maan*, Middle East Briefing (19 February 2003).

Border areas usually engage in smuggling and illegal activities. Ma'an has a huge desert border with Saudi Arabia that is difficult to monitor. Smuggling is rampant. Residents noted that although Ma'an is a southern state, smuggling individuals to Syria in the north was manageable. Similar dynamics are evident in Bekaa valley in Lebanon¹¹⁸ and in ben Querdan in Tunisia.¹¹⁹

Apart from Ma'an, the second and third governorates on the percentage of radicals compared to total population are Zarqa 318 (22.1%) and Balqa 93 (17.9%) (Map 1 and Table 2), confirming again the clustering of radicals in urban areas of central Jordan.

This clustering is not purely geographic. Relative deprivation felt by residents is political as well. The literature on cities and politics in Jordan offers valuable insights. Ababsa notes that although loyalty to the regime was rural, and Irbid and Karak were considered untrustworthy towns as centres of the political left,¹²⁰ Shalabi argues that discontent has now spread to the peripheries as well, and now extends to tribes, who are crucial for the stability of the monarchy.¹²¹

Tribes have historically enjoyed protection from the state, but in its quest to protect the nation-state, Jordan's democratization efforts have weakened traditional identities and failed to strengthen the collective national identity. With rising political frustrations and identity conflicts, some tribal youths joined Daesh, who picked on this sensitivity and had four such members record a video message to Jordanians in April 2017. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyse these dynamics, but readers are cautioned that political and citizenship factors contribute to the phenomenon.

Table 2. Jordanian Jihadi Salafis per 100 K population by governorate (2017).

Governorate	Total Jihadi Salafis	Total Population	Jihadi Salafis per 100 K Population
Ajloun	1	185,700	0.5
Amman	91	4,226,700	2.2
Aqaba	2	198,500	1.0
Balqa	93	518,600	17.9
Irbid	132	1,867,000	7.1
Jerash	4	250,000	1.6
Karak	37	333,900	11.1
Ma'an	70	152,000	46.1
Madaba	4	199,500	2.0
Mafraq	4	580,000	0.7
Tafilah	6	101,600	5.9
Zarqa	318	1,439,500	22.1

¹¹⁸Barik Mhadeen, *Human Security: Localized Insights from Baalbek* (Amman: WANA Institute, 2019).

¹¹⁹Maher Zoghlemi and Helmi Toumi, *The Battle of Ben Guerdan: Between Savagery and Resilience* (Amman: WANA Institute, 2019).

¹²⁰Ababsa, 'Citizenship and Urban Issues', 51.

¹²¹Jamal Al-Shalabi and Yahya Ali, 'The Crisis of the Center with the Peripheries in Jordan: The Hour of Confrontation Has Struck', *Dans Confluences Méditerranée* 2, no. 85, (2013): 75–86.

Discussion and conclusion

Relative deprivation and the closely knit social network explain the rise of Jihadi Salafism in Jordan between 2011 and 2017. Radicalization in Jordan starts with economic, social or political grievances. This sense of frustration, common among Jordanians, turns into feelings of relative deprivation for some individuals, which also highlights unmet identity needs. Once operating in a social network of peers, these individuals move towards radicalization.

This article has focused on socio-economic relative deprivation based mainly on variables of education, employment and geographic location of the research sample. The results point to a relative deprivation triangle of education, employment and (dis)satisfaction. The misfit between education/employment and income levels lead to dissatisfaction based on either unmet identity needs or inability of individuals to attain that to which they feel entitled.

In this triangle, it is not the level of education per se that defines relative deprivation. Some individuals are uneducated but employed. This is an important diversion from the literature where it is assumed that the uneducated are poor. Our data shows that some of the uneducated are middle-class individuals by merit of employment. Most are employed in the private sector which does not always require a perfect fit between education level and work responsibilities. However, their employment/income does not meet their needs, efforts or skills, which leads to dissatisfaction. We, therefore, conclude that radicalization is a middle-class phenomenon.

Geography also contributes to relative deprivation. The further from the capital, the poorer the services. But what makes radicalization an urban phenomenon in Jordan is the fact that the discrepancy in services and opportunities is blatantly obvious to residents of central governorates from a nearby capital. This is not to ignore the fact that marginalized remote governorates feel deprived and Jihadi Salafis flourish in one of them (Ma'an), but the scene of Jihadi Salafism is shifting towards central urban areas.

Relative deprivation does not directly lead to radicalization. The transformation takes shape through a social network, which is well-documented in Jordan. Therefore, we did not discuss it. However, results on age variables highlight how Jihadi Salafism is now a family phenomenon whereby younger generations, including women, turn radical. Although the youth bulge contributes to the phenomenon, we encourage further research to examine relative deprivation on the family level instead of individuals. This might offer valuable explanations of radicalization in Jordan.

We deduct from the findings that Jihadi Salafism is set to increase in Jordan. First, the socio-economic frustrations that lead to relative deprivation have not been systematically addressed by the government. In fact, socio-economic conditions in Jordan have deteriorated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Second, the national and regional political environment that led to political frustrations and unmet political identity needs has deteriorated. Despite the defeat of Daesh in 2017, extremist groups -including Daesh- still threaten Iraq, Syria and Libya. Instability has extended to Lebanon and Tunisia. Sunni-Shii sectarianism is flourishing with the war in Yemen, and the Sunni power vacuum is deepening.

Finally, one-third of Salafi Jihadis in our sample (31%) are supporters of Daesh, the most extremist group. Although popular support for Daesh has declined in Jordan after the immolation of Jordanian pilot Kasasbeh in 2015, and the following defeat of Daesh, individuals do not easily forgo an ideology they passionately embraced. Further research is needed on whether and in what way support to Daesh has declined. Crucially, without serious measures to ideologically counter Jihadi Salafism, its adherents will continue to enact their violent ideas locally or regionally. Although several projects were conducted in Jordan to prevent and counter violent extremism, their impact remains questionable.¹²²

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¹²²Suad Al-Sharafat, 'Assessing Jordan's National Strategy to Combat Violent Extremism,' *Fikra Forum*, 10 August 2018.